Country Report Belgium

by Nicolas Perrin
and Quentin Schoonvaere

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About the authors

Nicolas Perrin, Researcher, Groupe d’étude de Démographie Appliquée (GéDAP)/ Université catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, perrin.nicolas@gmail.com

Quentin Schoonvaere, Researcher, Groupe d’étude de Démographie Appliquée (GéDAP)/ Université catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, quentin.schoonvaere@uclouvain.be
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A. Key data sources and responsible institutions

*Statistics Belgium*, which depends of the Federal Public Service of Economy, is responsible for the production of official statistics requested by the various regulations. This agency collects data on demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the Belgian population. They produce statistics on birth, deaths, divorces, marriages, population stocks and population flows. For these statistics, the main source is the National Register (a Central Population Register). Statistics Belgium is also responsible for carrying out the censuses and several surveys.

The National Register is the main data source for demographic data on migration, foreigners and populations with a foreign background. It is a centralised population register under the responsibility of the *Federal Public Service of Interior*. The information is primarily collected for administrative purposes. However, it is also used secondarily by other public services to produce statistics. For instance, part of the information collected is used by Statistics Belgium to produce demographic and migration statistics, whereas another part of it is used to produce asylum statistics.

The demographic statistics are produced using the legal concept of resident population excluding two important categories registered in the National Register: asylum seekers (Perrin and Poulain, 2006b), diplomats, international civil servants (mainly working for the EU institutions and NATO) as well as soldiers working for NATO. Moreover, this concept of legal resident population excludes the undocumented migrants and foreigner residing in Belgium for less than three months.

The asylum statistics are produced by the different bodies in charge of the examination of asylum applications using the part of the National Register dedicated to the registration of the asylum procedure.

Several databases that are more or less closely linked to the National Register record additional information about the legal status of immigrants and administrative measures related to foreigners: the visa database of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, the immigration service database and the work permit database of the Federal Public Service of Employment. The first database in this field is maintained by the *Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs* and record information about all applications for visas and the decisions related to these applications (Perrin, 2007). The second database is maintained by the *Immigration Service* and record information about the legal status of all foreigners either residing legally in Belgium or applying for a regularisation, a residence permit, asylum, a visa. It also contains data about undocumented aliens who were asked to leave the country, were apprehended or were removed. A third database of this type is maintained by the *Federal Public Service of Employment* and contains data about work permit holders.

Several databases record information about the socio-economic characteristics of immigrants. Traditionally this type of information was collected through censuses organised by Statistics Belgium. However, from 1991, Belgium does not organise traditional census anymore. In 2001, an exhaustive survey was organised to get additional socio-economic information about persons who are registered in the National Register. The next operation of this type is expected to be completely register-based. The Datawarehouse Labour Market and Social Protection hold by the
Crossroads Bank for Social Security should be one of the main data sources of this next operation since it is the main administrative database recording information related to activity, employment and social security. This database closely linked to the National Register is actually the central database of all institutions working in the sector of social security and records a complete history of the involvement of the labour market of persons covered by the Belgian social security system. The Labour Force Survey completes this information. The introduction of a special module dedicated to the insertion of persons with a foreign background on the labour market in the next round of this survey should renew the interest for that tool for researchers in the field of integration.

Few data are systematically collected on undocumented migrants. Most of them are compiled by the Immigration Service and concern the “prevention or repression of illegal migration”. Two important tables concerning apprehended and refused/removed undocumented migrants are published monthly by this body.

Finally, some surveys are conducted by several research centre which are linked to Belgian universities. For example the Institute of Social and Political Opinion Research (ISPO), attached to University of Leuven, has conducted a survey on the integration of migrants of second generation.

**B. Historical evolution of the national data collection system/ data collection practices and policies on data collection**

Pursuant to the Decree of June 30, 1846, the Population Registers were introduced in every Belgian commune from 1847. These registers provide a statement of the legal population and all the events and changes that affect this population over time (Eggerickx, 2005). This source providing direct information on migration (dates of entry and exit of the commune, place of origin and destination). Since the mid-19th century, data on immigration and emigration, registered in Population Registers, are centralized and published by the National Statistical Office (Eggerickx, Perrin, Thomsin, 2007).

Since the Royal Decree of January 9, 1832, the local authorities maintain a “register of foreigners”. Before 1921, in practice, each foreigner was registered in both registers (Population Registers and Registers of Foreigners). Starting from 1921, foreigners holding a non-permanent residence permit whose stay exceed 15 days, had to be registered in this specific register whereas foreigners holding a permanent residence permit were registered in the normal Populations Registers like Belgian citizens. Currently, both types of registers are used to produce statistics.

Belgium has a centralised population register since 1985. These register has become the main source to produce statistical data in the field of migration from the beginning of the 1990’s. A subset of the National register, the waiting register, has been created in 1995 for the registration of the asylum procedure. Since these date, asylum seekers are excluded from the legal resident population and are neither taken into account in the immigration statistics nor in the resident population. In a near future, probably 2009, the Belgian Statistics will produce two types of immigration statistics
(for the definition of immigration see section 4). The first will be produced for international comparison purposes and will include migrants and asylum seekers, who stay one year or more on the territory, in order to satisfy the 2007 European regulation on migration statistics. The second statistics will be produce for national purposes according to national legal requirement and will not take into account the asylum seekers in the immigration and demographic statistics.

The first Belgian census was organised by Adolphe Quetelet in 1846. From 1846 to 1880, censuses do not consider “nationality”. The foreign population was apprehended by the variable “place of birth” and, more specifically, the distinction between the place of birth in Belgium or the place of birth abroad. It is from the 1890 Census that the variable "nationality" has been introduced (Eggerickx, Perrin, Thomsin, 2007). Since the creation of the National Register, in 1985, the official enumeration of the population is determined by this Register and the census is mainly organised for collecting additional socio-economic variables. The last classic population census was carried out in March 1991. This census was the last which offered the possibility to update local registers. In 2001, a questionnaire was sent by mail to all persons registered in the RN in order to cover areas not covered by the National Register (for example activity, housing, education, and so on). In the future, there are plans to make an exhaustive “census” only based on administrative registers. Using the Personal Identification Number (Numéro National), it is possible to link several databases. For example, the Crossroads Bank for Social Security should be one source of information for activity. However, new registers still have to be developed for to get complete information like in the previous census (Poulain and Perrin, 2006).

C. Coordination and linking

The National Register and the National Number (in fact the specific PIN of the National Register that is used by most of other administration) can be considered as the central source of the administrative databases and statistics in Belgium. Most of national databases are linked to it. A lot of statistics are produced using directly this register. Most of national surveys use it to determine the sampling frame.

Theoretically, Statistics Belgium should be the main institution collecting data and publishing statistics in Belgium. However, the coordination of migration is quite weak. Several institutions maintain independently databases and produce their own statistics on migration (e.g. Immigration Service). In addition, more specific indicators linked to legal status and employment are directly produced by the responsible institution (e.g. Federal Public Services of Foreign Affairs for visas, Immigration Service for residence permits, Federal Public Services of Employment for work permits, General Commission for Refugees and Stateless Persons for asylum...). Finally, several institutions publish statistical reports on migration including contradictory estimations of the different phenomenon (Immigration Service, National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, Federal Public Service Employment that is responsible for the SOPEMI report, Migration Department of the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism...).
As far as demographic indicators, Statistics Belgium is considered to be the more competent body. For legal status, the Immigration Service is considered as being the best contact point. For acquisition of citizenship, data are published independently by Statistics Belgium, the Immigration Service and the Parliament, but Statistics Belgium data are the only one to be considered as complete, reliable and detailed. As far as asylum is concerned, Immigration Service, General Commission for Refugees and Stateless Persons, "Foreigner Litigation Council", State Council publish partially contradictory data, but the reports of the General Commission for Refugees and Stateless Persons are considered as more reliable.

Statistics related to the socio-economic situation are produced by Statistics Belgium, the Cross-Sectional Database and the Federal Public Service Employment. The datawarehouse labour market and social protection of Crossroads Bank for Social Security is a virtual database built by linking various data sources and is considered to be the best source on the topic. This data source links the National Register and, other databases of social security institutions (for example: National Office of Social Security (ONSS) - National Institute of sickness and disabilities (INAMI) National office for employment (ONEM), and so on).

Theoretically, all this public administrative databases can be linked using the National Number that is recorded in each register. However, to do so, one must be authorised by law (e.g. the access of Statistics Belgium to administrative databases is explicitly or implicitly determined by laws) and/or by the Commission for Protection of Private Life. As a consequence, the next census should be entirely based on the linkage of administrative databases.

D. Concepts and definitions

From the end of the Second World War\(^1\), citizenship is the central concepts for data collection in the field of migration and integration.

However, this exclusive use of citizenship is currently challenged (Perrin, Dal and Poulain, 2007). At first, the traditionally restrictive citizenship law was completely reformed during the 1980’s and the 1990’s. As a consequence, the Belgian citizenship law is one of the most liberal concerning acquisitions of citizenship and data by citizenship cannot reflect the impact of migration and population with a foreign background anymore. In addition, even if the ethnic reference is still nearly unacceptable in the French-speaking part of the country like in France, it is not the case in the Dutch-speaking region (Flanders) where the category of “allochtone”\(^2\) was imported from the Netherlands (Jacobs and Rea, 2005). Finally, the ethnicisation of social relations cannot be denied anymore due to the persistence of discrimination among Belgian citizens from foreign origin. As a consequence, the development of new indicators related to the origin is seen as a possible way of monitoring the ethnic

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\(^1\) Before this date, statistics by citizenship and country of birth were parallely published. In addition, until the 1950’s data according to language were collected through censuses.

\(^2\) By opposition to « autochtones ».
discrimination and a tool to fight against it (Centre pour l’égalité des chances et la lutte contre le racisme, 2007).

At the beginning of the 1990, demographers from Louvain-la-Neuve proposed to reintroduce the use of the concepts of “citizenship at birth”, “place of birth” and “duration of stay” to understand the population with a foreign background (Debuisson and Poulain, 1992). Using data from the population register on acquisition of citizenship and non-published data from the 1991 census on citizenship at birth, they published several documents describing the impact of the choice of citizenship as a central concept, the population having a foreign citizenship at birth appearing as a possible better proxy of the population with a foreign population, the differences within this population between recent and old immigrants as well as between “first” and “second generation” (Eggerickx, Kesteloot et al., 1999; Poulain and Perrin, 2002). In a second step, citizenship at birth was used to describe the ethno-stratification of the labour market (Vertommen, Martens and Ouali, 2006). Recently (September 2007), Statistics Belgium announced its intention to regularly publish data by citizenship at birth and country of birth (Direction Général Statistique et Information Economique, 2007).

Recently, the necessity to overpass citizenship at birth was emphasized (Centre pour l’égalité des chances et la lutte contre le racisme, 2007) and practical possibilities were tested using characteristics of the parents (Poulain and Perrin, 2007; Perrin, Dal et Poulain, 2007).

In Belgium, the concept of administrative place of residence is supposed to correspond to the concept of usual place of residence. All Belgian citizens and foreigners holding a residence permit valid for more than three months are considered as residents and counted from the first day of their stay in Belgium. A foreigner entering Belgium with or without visa (depending on bilateral or international agreements) has the right to stay in Belgium for up to 3 months without being registered in the population register. If s/he has the right to reside longer in Belgium and intend to do so s/he must be registered and the timing of this registration (maximum 8 days after arrival) will decide when s/he will start to be counted in the resident population. From 1995, asylum seekers are excluded from this population even if they are registered in a specific part of the National Register (the so-called “waiting list”).

In Belgium the concepts of “immigrants” and emigrants” are linked to the administrative registration in the National Register. A person is registered as immigrant if he or she declare his or her arrival to the municipality of residence and intend to stay more than three months in the country. An emigrant is an individual who intends to live abroad for more than three months and has declared this emigration. These administrative definitions exclude undocumented migrants and asylum seekers from the legal population and at the same time from the registration of international migrations. The concept of “duration of stay” is also defined according to the administrative registration. However, a condition to be registered as an international migrant is a minimum duration of stay of three months. As a consequence, stays shorter than 3 months cannot be recorded.
Since this definition does not follow international recommendations (United Nations, 1998) and the recently adopted EU regulation\(^3\). Statistics Belgium should soon publish data following the one-year rule and including asylum seekers for Eurostat in parallel to usual data published following the Belgian specific definition. As a consequence, two different types of data should be available at the national and European level from 2008.

### E. Availability of data

#### E.1. Core demographic data on immigrants and migration control

**E.1.a Population stocks and general demographic characteristics**

Data on population stocks and general demographic characteristics are published annually by age, sex, marital status, household type and size, municipality, citizenship. It should be published by country of birth and citizenship of birth soon. On request, data by duration of stay or citizenship at birth are available.

**E.1.b Migration flows and characteristics of migrants at the time of migration**

Data on migration flows and demographic characteristics of migrants at the time of migration are published annually by age, sex, marital status, municipality of residence, citizenship. It should be published by country of birth, citizenship of birth, country of origin and destination soon. On request, data by duration of stay and citizenship at birth are available. These characteristics are available only for the legal resident population registered in the RN. The variables “country of previous/next residence” are available but unreliable due to the problems of recording in the National Register.

**E.1.c Residence permits**

On request, data on residence permits are available by age, sex, municipality, citizenship, type of permit and duration of validity. It will be available by reason for migration from 2008. Rough estimation of regularisation are available from the Immigration Service. However, the date on residence permit is produced for internal use of the Ministry and they are not systematically published.

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E.1.d Change of citizenship

On request, data on changes of citizenship (acquisitions and losses) are available by age, sex, municipality, previous/new citizenship, type of procedure. It does not include any information on possible multiple citizenships, which are quite probable since the Belgian citizenship code does not put any condition concerning this topic for foreigners willing to acquire the Belgian citizenship. Limited data on results of the acquisition procedure (applications, positive and negative decisions) are available.

E.1.e Asylum seeking and refugees

Asylum seekers are neither included in migration flows nor in population stock. However, such data should be published for Eurostat to follow the EU regulation on migration statistics. Refugees are included in population stocks and emigration statistics, but not in immigration statistics. This problem is also expected to be solved in order to include newly recognised refugees in immigration rather than in “adjustments” as it is currently done. Specific data will be produced for Eurostat (for the EU regulation) to include asylum seekers after one year of legal stay.

E.1.f Irregular migration

Data on, apprehensions and removals/refusals of undocumented migrants are monthly published by the Immigration Service. The CIREFI data collection on apprehended foreigners without any valid identity papers or travel documents, people who have been refused but still enter the territory illegally and people subject to a prohibition on residence but residing in the country is based on these data of the Immigration Service. However, data transmitted slightly differ from data published at the national level due to specificities of the CIREFI definitions. For instance, the CIREFI does not include people covered by Community law (EEA citizens) (Perrin 2006). For aliens removed, the CIREFI includes in its statistics the people who are not covered by community law and are removed to a third country (outside the European Union)\(^4\).

E.2. Measuring integration, discrimination and diversity

E.2.a Employment

At national level the most interesting data source to study employment is certainly the Datawarehouse Labour Market and Social Protection of Crossroads Bank for Social Security that centralised a lot of information from other databases (DIMONA, INASTI...)\(^5\). It provides a complete view on employment trajectories. The main drawback of this system is the difficult access to this database and the limited number of published statistics. This system will in the future be the main source for

\(^4\) For a more general presentation on research in this field, see Kaizen and Nonneman (2007) or van Meeteren, van San and Engbersen, 2008.

\(^5\) These individual sources can be more easily accessible and/or contain more detailed information.
data that were previously produced on the basis of censuses (the next census should be fully registered based).

The new LIMOSA database should complement this system by recording information on detached workers working in Belgium, but submitted to social security in their country of origin. However, no statistics are currently available due to the recent establishment of this database.

Work permits are rarely used to apprehend employment of immigrants due to the high proportion of immigrants that does not need such an authorisation. Actually, the evolution of this type of indicators represents more the evolution of the legislation in this field than a real evolution of the employment of immigrants.

In all databases, citizenship is the main variable used to identify persons with a migration background. Even if data on citizenship at birth are collected, it is rarely used due to its absence in official publications and the strict access rules for this type of variable. The centre for equal opportunities and opposition to racism is currently trying to establish a “socio-economic monitoring of persons with a migration background on the labour market”. This tool should be based on a linkage between National Register and Crossroads bank for social security. It should focus on foreigners, Belgian citizens by acquisition and offspring of such persons (Centre pour l’égalité des chances et la lutte contre le racisme, 2007).

For comparisons at EU level, the LFS is certainly one of the best tools (and the more easily accessible), but results are unfortunately not reliable in order to detail the countries of citizenship, which results in a limited interest for this type of data. In addition, results are questionable for immigrants due to small numbers of them in the samples.

Another survey related to employment is the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). This survey is a good tool for comparisons at EU level and more specifically on incomes related to the professional status.

**E.2.b Incomes, transfers and social benefits**

In this field, the Datawarehouse labour market and social protection of Crossroads Bank for Social Security is also certainly the most promising source. The Datawarehouse contains detailed indicators on incomes and social benefits. The amount, the period and the justification of each social allowance are detailed in this database. However, due to the strict access rule, the LFS and the ESS are often used in spite of the already mentioned limitation due to the variables identifying persons of migration background.

The European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) is an important tool to establish a mapping of poverty and social exclusion. The interest of this survey lies in its comparability with other surveys which are conducted, on the basis of the same methodology, in other European countries. The main variable identifying the migrant population is the citizenship.
Finally, the LIMOSA database on declaration of foreign activities in Belgium contains information on the persons coming to work in the kingdom. These data-source can provide information on income transfers insofar the persons are detached in Belgium in order to work. To identify the origin of the person the main variable is the citizenship of the employee.

**E.2.c Housing and residential patterns**

The censuses are the main source for studying housing currently. However, this should rapidly change due to the project for establishment of a completely registered based census. The main variables which identify the migrant population are the citizenship (current and at birth) and the country of birth. The main indicators are: the type of dwelling, the size of all rooms, the period of construction, the main transformations since the previous census, the heating system, the type of energy, information on isolation, the subjective perception of the housing state, and many other indicators.

The European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) contains some indicators on housing and more specifically financial indicators related to housing.

**E.2.d Health and access to Healthcare**

The main source in this field is the Health Interview Survey. However, due to the limited size of the sample, we must remain cautious about the use of this survey for specific groups. Nevertheless, the survey contains good indicators on health or access to healthcare (e.g. tobacco consumption, contraception, AIDS, nutrition, subjective state health, and so on). Moreover, the migrant population is identified on the basis of citizenship but also by country at birth.

The Socio-Economic Survey 2001 contains data on subjective health state, on long-term diseases or handicap and on the impact of these problems on the professional activity. Classical demographical statistics are available by citizenship (and possibly by country of birth and citizenship at birth by using individual data from the National Register).

The statistical databases of Deaths and Births, which are based on vital statistics, are also very interesting for health studies. Indicators on mortality (e.g. initial and immediate cause of death) and infant mortality are available by citizenship. The statistics of births can provide information on the health of newborns on the bases of the parent's citizenship before and after the marriage.

The European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) contains also some indicators on health and more specifically on health spending. This survey is very interesting to approach the problem of health through variables such as income and living conditions.
E.2.e Education

Due to their completeness, censuses are considered as an important data source in this field. The main indicators are: the higher level of education, the age of acquisition of this level, the number of year spent in education, the type of diploma, the education orientation and the place where the diploma was obtained. The 2001 Socio-Economic Survey (which is also considered as a census) contains also indicators on professional training.

The census data should be completed by results from surveys (e.g. PISA) and statistics compiled on the basis of inscription in schools by the administrations of linguistic community. The survey contains indicators on the student level in mathematic, reading and science. The PISA survey is also an interesting tool due to the variables used to identifying the migrants (country of birth but also country of birth of the parents and the language that is most spoken at home). Another advantage of the PISA project is the possibility to lead comparative researches between OECD countries.

The European Social Survey (ESS), the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Integration of the European Second generation Survey (TIES Survey) contain also key indicators on education and parents’ education. According the type of survey, these indicators on education can be associated with others like working indicators, socio-economic indicators and so on.

E.2.f Family and household

The National Register, the censuses and statistics on divorces and marriages are the main data sources to study families and households in Belgium. The quality of data is good, except for latter statistics. Actually marriages statistics based on marriages celebrated in Belgian municipalities should not be used to apprehend nuptiality of immigrants due to the high proportion of marriages occurring abroad or in foreign consulates in Belgium.

The European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) gives some indicators on the family situation and on the household incomes. The economical situation of the household is put forward in this survey.

E.2.g Political participation

The European Social Survey (ESS) contains also indicators like the ideological adherence, the subjective representation of the politics and the involvement in political parties and trade unions. Comparative studies are possible due to the common methodology of this European survey. The Eurobarometer is a tool of the European Union aimed at analysing values and attitudes on various subjects across Europe and provides also information on political participation.

However, more restricted survey produced by academics may be more useful. The main data source in this field are the General Election Study Belgium of 2003 and
1999. Only these two post-electoral studies contain variables which enable the researcher to identify the migrant population (citizenship at birth and citizenship of parents at birth). Data has been collected on political information and knowledge, perception of political bodies such as parties, and perceptions of important issues. However, the researcher must remain cautious due to the weak representativeness of specific groups.

The Integration of the European Second generation Survey (TIES Survey) is a survey conducted only in Brussels and Antwerp. This study contains some variables devoted to the political integration of second-generation immigrants. The specificity of the survey is that the group of second-generation immigrants can be compared to a test group of non-migrants.

E.2.h Crime and justice

The Federal Public Service of Justice is responsible for publishing statistics in this field. These administrative databases are not easily accessible: the only statistics available are the aggregate ones in the annual report of the Ministry of Justice.6

The European Crime and Safety Survey (EU ICS) is a tool for measuring the volume and the nature of crime in Europe. However, the researcher must remains careful in the use of this tool due to the weaknesses related to the size of the sample.

In conclusion, the Belgian databases are very good tools to measuring integration, discrimination and diversity in the country. However, each type of database has his advantages and his inconveniences. On the one hand we have exhaustive databases (registers and Census) where the representativeness of the population is guaranteed (e.g. National register, Datawarehouse Labour Market and Social Protection of Crossroads Bank for Social Security, Censuses, and so on). However the weakness of these sources are the leak variables which can identified the population with a foreign background. By coupling the 1991 census (where the citizenship of birth is asked) with the National Register we can distinguish the Belgian Birth, the foreign persons born abroad and the foreign persons born in Belgium. This typology is the most detailed to measuring integration, discrimination and diversity on the bases of exhaustive data.

On the other hand we have non-exhaustive databases like survey where the representativeness of migrant population or population with a migrant background is not necessarily assured. This representativeness varying from a survey to another depending on its purpose (e.g. the survey on the migrants of second generation provides a good representativeness of this group). However, the surveys have certain advantages linked to a greater freedom in the designing of the questions. Indeed, some surveys take into account the parents’ citizenship, the religion, the language spoken, and so on. This type of information is more pertinent for to measuring the integration, discrimination and diversity but they must be used with caution because of the problem of representativeness.

F. Accessibility of data

In Belgium the accessibility of dataset is not always easy, especially for individual data. The access to individual data is systematically submitted to the privacy commission. The decision of the commission is based to several laws organising the protection of privacy. Concerning the cost of administrative data, it often also depends on the decision of the responsible institution.

Regarding aggregate data, the access is less restrictive and generally inexpensive. Most of them are available on the institution’s website or in various publications or reports. The conditions of access for each institution responsible of dataset are detailed below. However, the availability of such data strongly relies on the efforts developed by each institution to evaluate its activity, to produce statistics and to make these data available.

F.1. Statistics Belgium

In Belgium, the statistical institute prints and publishes annual aggregate demographic statistics (on births, deaths, marriages and divorces, population stocks and flows). These publications are also available on the website of the statistics Belgium (www.statbel.fgov.be). However, the annual publications on births and deaths have been delayed and they stop in the early 2000. On this website several aggregate data are also accessible in excel files.

The survey, the census data and the individual data (on births, deaths, marriages and divorces) produced by Statistics Belgium are more difficult to access. In fact in order to get access to data, one needs to apply to the privacy commission. The procedure and forms for access to individual data are available on its website (http://www.privacycommission.be). More precisely, a sectorial comity, the surveillance comity of the statistics, must authorized Statistics Belgium to communicate economic information and individual study data. In general, if access is granted, the researcher should not pay for this.

F.2. The federal public service of interior

Under the responsibility of the Minister of Interior, the General Direction Institutions and Populations, is responsible for the diffusion of data coming from National Register. The access to individual data is subject to the approbation of the sectorial comity of the National Register. This sub-comity of the privacy commission allows the access to information contained in the NR and the utilisation of the National Register Number. Aggregate statistics are accessible for free on the National Register Website (www.ibz.rmn.fgov.be). However, these data are quite limited (they are available only by large cities or by region).

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7 These laws are: - the law of 8 August 1983 organising a National Population Register. – the law of 15 January on the establishment and organisation of the Crossroads Bank of Social Security. – the law of 8 December 1992 on the protection of privacy life and on the processing on personal data.
F.3. The immigrant service

The immigrant service publishes annual aggregate data on the asylum procedures and unaccompanied minors. Statistics on asylum are provided to Eurostat and are available on the immigrant service website (www.dofi.fgov.be) as well as Eurostat website.


The access to individual data of this organism is also subject to the surveillance of a sectorial comity of privacy commission. The sectorial comity of the Crossroads bank for social security and employment is empowered to issue information contained in this database. In addition, the access can be quite expensive for the searcher according the quantity of this information.

The access to aggregate data is easier than the access to individual data. A CD-ROM/DVD that contains a series of tables that give a very precise and detailed view of the Belgian labour market and a general socio-economic situation of the population, is available at a price of 50 Euros. Other aggregate data on the socio-economic position, less detailed, are also available on the institution’s website (www.bcss.fgov.be).

G. Quality and scope of data collection

In Belgium, the National Population Register ensures a good data collection. All persons residing legally in the country for more than three months and who have declared his/her arrivals are registered in the National Register. The problems of quality are linked to the declarations of the persons. Some of them do not declare their departure in order to conserve benefits linked to the registration, for administrative facilities or other reasons. There is also problems for the declarations of arrivals/departures. At first, in some cases, there is no registration at all (e.g. the illegal foreigners do not declare their arrival on the territory). Secondly, there is often a delay between the date of migration and the date of (de)registration in particular, for all EU citizens, but also for non-EU being regularised or losing their right to stay. In the latter case, the date of registration is not the date of immigration, but the date of regularisation whereas the date of deregistration is not the date of emigration, but the date of the end of validity of the residence permit.

The Waiting Register is a good database to collect information on asylum seekers. All asylum applicants or members of their family are included in the Waiting Register until the end of the asylum procedure. However, it is not easy to know if the asylum applicant is still on the territory. The inverse situation is possible, the applicant would have leaved the territory but he/she is still there.

The database of the Immigrant Service includes information on almost all foreigners who are in the Belgian territory at one time. Like the other administrative databases, it is possible to have gaps between people registered and those who are actually
there. However, the Immigrant Service is the unique database who collects information on undocumented migrants through the recording of apprehensions, refusals and removals of foreigners.

Other administrative databases maintained by the Federal Public Services (work permit database, visa database, Datawarehouse labour market and social protection, DIMONA and LIMOSA databases) can be consulted to derived estimation of specific flows. However, discrepancies may be observed due to different rule for registration. In addition, even if the quality of data collections is certainly high, the quality of published data is often questionable.

H. Conclusions - Recommendations

In Belgium migration data collections are mainly based on the numerous administrative databases recording the population residing legally in the kingdom and administrative decisions or events of interests for the administrations. The national population register is at the centre of the system, but it is de facto only a small part of the statistical system, which is rapidly expending.

In this context, one paradoxical characteristics of the situation concerning migration statistics is the limited availability of migration data and statistical publications in this field, which is mainly linked to: the relatively difficult access to administrative records for researchers, but also Statistics Belgium; the limited efforts made by governmental bodies to publish (reliable) statistics; the sensitivity of specific topics (irregular migration, regularisation, population of migration background, ethnic data…).

As a consequence, in spite of the limited number of officially published indicators, researchers must often investigate the registration of events and try to get access to the database or send a request for a specific investigation. In addition, academic publications may be much more interesting in terms of statistical contents than official publications. This current situation is not satisfactory, because 1/ academic publications are not often repeated and the apprehension of trends is impossible 2/ the reliability of statistics compiled by academics may not be satisfactory 3/ applied definitions may not be comparable across publications, time…

Official migration statistics are currently considered reliable in spite of 1/ the exclusion of irregular migrants (the size of this population is commonly estimated to 100.000), 2/ an acknowledged problems of emigration declarations that may result in an overestimation of the stock, 3/ the exclusion of asylum seekers, 4/ some problems related to the registration of short-term migrants from the EU. These data do not comply with international recommendations and the EU regulation on migration statistics, because they exclude asylum seekers and they include all legal immigrants staying in Belgium or emigrants leaving Belgium for more than three months (whereas it is recommended to include only migrants staying one year or more or leaving for one year or more).

Existing asylum statistics correspond roughly to EU request. However, several problems should be noticed. Several estimates of each indicators are published by
different organisations (Immigration Service, General Commissioner for Refugees and Stateless Persons, Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers…). Discrepancies result mainly from different definitions, in particular the inclusion of repeat applications and the inclusion of family members… The available estimation of the number of pending requests should be carefully used due to their still questionable reliability/methodology. The same applies to the estimation of final negative decisions due to the complexity of possible events resulting in a negative decision.

Residence permits statistics are progressively produced. In spite of the good quality of data, produced data and data transmitted to Eurostat until now cannot be considered as fully satisfactory. The introduction of a new variable in the National Register should solve one part of the problem. However, the difficulties faced to develop an adequate procedure for producing the requested statistics are not yet solved. As a consequence, from a general point of view, available data should not be used and should not be considered as realistically reflecting the situation.

Statistics on refusals, apprehensions and removals of undocumented migrations follow the European regulation. The only remaining problems are the provision of data by age and sex. However, this problem should not be difficult to solve. In spite of this relatively satisfactory situation, like in other EU countries, these statistics cannot be realistically used to apprehend irregular migration, but they are correctly representing the policy related to the prevention of irregular migration and the policy related to forced and assisted returns of irregular migrants. In addition, the comparability of collected data with data collected in other member-states is questionable (Jandl and Kraler, 2006).

Concerning the integration of populations of migration background, available data are currently limited by the variable usually used to define the target group, i.e. citizenship. Since Belgium has currently the most liberal nationality law in Europe (naturalisation is for example possible after 3 years of legal residence, 2 years for refugees; nationality may be acquired by simple declaration after 7 years…), the foreign population cannot be considered a realistic proxy of the population of migration background. Occasionally, data by citizenship at birth or more recently citizenship at birth of the parents are produced (Centre pour l’égalité des chances et la lutte contre le racisme, 2008; Poulain and Perrin, 2008). The creation of a socio-economic monitoring of the labour market according to citizenship and country of birth of parents could improve the situation, but the final political decision regarding the development of such a tool is not yet fixed due to the controversial status of questions related to the development of statistics on population of migration background or ethnic data in Belgium (Perrin, Dal and Poulain, 2007).

Statistics Belgium is currently developing a project aiming at ensuring the production of migration statistics following the EU regulation in the framework of the EU project ILMAS of Eurostat. Results are however not yet available. In addition, due to remaining difference between Belgian legislation and EU legislation, statistics currently published will remain as the reference data used at the national level. As a consequence, this will create a double statistics on the same subject that may be difficult to understand and to justify.
Bibliography


## Annex 1 - Datasets on migrations/integration in Belgium

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